Northern Ndebele language

Northern Ndebele (English: /ɛndəˈbiːliː/), also called **Ndebele**, **amaNdebele**, **Zimbabwean Ndebele**[1] or **North Ndebele**,[4][5] and formerly known as **Matabele**, is an African language belonging to the Nguni group of Bantu languages, spoken by the Northern Ndebele people, or Matabele, of Zimbabwe.

Northern Ndebele is related to the Zulu language, spoken in South Africa. This is because the Northern Ndebele people of Zimbabwe descend from followers of the Zulu leader Mzilikazi (one of Zulu King Shaka's generals), who left the Zulu Kingdom in the early 19th century, during the Mfecane, arriving in present-day Zimbabwe in 1839.

Although there are some differences in grammar, lexicon and intonation between Zulu and Northern Ndebele, the two languages share more than 85% of their lexicon.[6] To prominent Nguni linguists like Anthony Cope and Cyril Nyembezi, Northern Ndebele is a dialect of Zulu. To others like Langa Khumalo, it is a language. Distinguishing between a language and a dialect for language varieties that are very similar is difficult, with the decision often being based not on linguistic but political criteria.[7][8][9]

Northern Ndebele and Southern Ndebele (or Transvaal Ndebele), which is spoken in South Africa, are separate but related languages with some degree of mutual intelligibility, although the former is more closely related to Zulu. Southern Ndebele, while maintaining its Nguni roots, has been influenced by the Sotho languages.[10]

Northern Ndebele	
Zimbabwe Ndebele	
isiNdebele saseNyakatho	
Region	Matabeleland North, Matabeleland South in Zimbabwe; North-East District in Botswana
Native speakers	1.6 million (2012)[1]
Language family	Niger–Congo • Atlantic–Congo • Volta-Congo • Benue–Congo • Bantoid • Southern Bantoid • Bantu • Southern Bantu • Nguni • Zunda • **Northern Ndebele**
Official status	
Official language in	🇿🇼 Zimbabwe
Language codes	
ISO 639-1	nd (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?iso_639_1=nd) — North Ndebele
ISO 639-2	nde (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=319) — North Ndebele
ISO 639-3	nde — North Ndebele
Glottolog	nort2795 (http://gl

Contents

Phonology

Consonants

	ottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/nort2795)[2]
Guthrie code	S.44[3]
Linguasphere	99-AUT-fk incl. varieties 99-AUT-fka to 99-AUT-fkd

The Ndebele Language	
Person	iNdebele
People	amaNdebele (prev. Matabele)
Language	isiNdebele

Northern Ndebele consonants

		Bilabial	Labio-dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	ejective	p [pʼ]		t [tʼ]			k [kʼ]	
	voiced	bh [b]		d [d]			g [g]	
	aspirated	ph [pʰ]		th [tʰ]			kh [kʰ]	
	prenasalized	mp [ᵐp]		nt [ⁿt]			nk [ᵑk]	
	prenasalized (vd.)	mb [ᵐb]		nd [ⁿd]			ng [ᵑg]	
Fricative	plain		f [f]	s [s]	sh [ʃ]			h [h]
	voiced (depr.)	b [βʱ]	v [vʱ]	z [zʱ]	zh [ʒʱ]		(k [ɣʱ])	(h [ɦ])
	voiced (non-depr.)	b [β]					(k [ɣ])	
	prenasalized		mf [ᶬf]	ns [ⁿs]				
	prenasalized (vd.)		mv [ᶬv]	nz [ⁿz]				
Nasal	plain	m [m]		n [n]		ny [ɲ]	ngh [ŋ]	
	depressed	m [mʱ]		n [nʱ]		ny [ɲʱ]	ngh [ŋʱ]	
Lateral fricative	plain			hl [ɬ]				
	voiced			dl [ɮ]				
	prenasalized			nhl [ⁿɬ]				
	prenasalized (vd.)			ndl [ⁿɮ]				
Rhotic				r [r]				
Approximant	plain	w [w]				y [j]		
	depressed	w [wʱ]				y [jʱ]		
Lateral approximant	plain			l [l]				
	depressed			l [lʱ]				

Affricates

			Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Velar
Affricate	**voiceless**	ejective	ts [tsʼ]	tj [tʃʼ]	kl [kxʼ]
		aspirated	tsh [tsʰ]	tjh [tʃʰ]	
	voiced			j [dʒ]	
	prenasalized	ejective	nts [ⁿtsʼ]	ntjh [ᶮtʃʼ]	nkl [ᵑkxʼ]
		voiced		nj [ᶮdʒ]	

Many consonant sounds may result in depressed (or breathy) allophones. Alveolar consonants, *t*, *d*, and *n*, may have dentalized allophones of [t̪ʼ, d̪, n̪]. Consonants *k* and *h* can result in allophones of [ɣ, ɣʰ] and [ħ].

Ndebele /t͡ʃ/ generally correspond to Zulu /ʃ/.[11]

Vowels

There are five vowel phonemes, written with the letters *a, e, i, o, u.*

- *a* is pronounced [a], approximately like *a* in father; e.g. **abantwana** (children)
- *e* is pronounced [ɛ] or [e], sometimes like *e* in bed; e.g. **emoyeni** (in the air)
- *i* is pronounced [i], like *ee* in see; e.g. **siza** (help)
- *o* is pronounced [ɔ] or [o], sometimes approximately like *o* in bone; e.g. **okhokho** (ancestors)
- *u* is pronounced [u], like *oo* in soon; e.g. **umuntu** (person)

Click consonants

In Northern Ndebele, there are three click consonants *c*, *q* and *x*.

c [ǀ] is made by placing the tip of the tongue against the front upper teeth and gums, the centre of the tongue is depressed and the tip of the tongue is drawn backwards. The resulting sound is similar to the sound used in English to express annoyance.[12] Some examples are **cina** (end), **cela** (ask). [13]

The *q* [!] sound is made by raising the back of the tongue to touch the soft palate and touching the gums with the sides and tip of the tongue. The centre of the tongue is depressed and the tip drawn quickly away from the gum. The resulting sound is like the "pop" heard when quickly removing the cork from a bottle.[12] Some examples are **qalisa** (start), **qeda** (finish). [13]

The *x* [ǁ] sound is made by placing the tongue so that the back of the tongue touches the soft palate and the sides and tip of the tongue touch the gums. One side of the tongue is quickly withdrawn from the gums.[12] Some examples are **xoxa** (discuss), **ixoxo** (frog). [13]

Northern Ndebele clicks

Plosive			Dental	Post-alveolar	Lateral
	voiceless	plain	**c** [kǀ]	**q** [k!]	**x** [kǁ]
		aspirated	**ch** [kǀʰ]	**qh** [k!ʰ]	**xh** [kǁʰ]
	voiced	depressed	**gc** [gǀʰ]	**gq** [g!ʰ]	**gx** [gǁʰ]
		nasalized	**nc** [ŋǀ]	**nq** [ŋ!]	**nx** [ŋǁ]
		nasalized (depr.)	**ngc** [ŋǀʰ]	**ngq** [ŋ!ʰ]	**ngx** [ŋǁʰ]

Examples

Months in Southern Ndebele

English	Northern Ndebele (Zimbabwe)	Southern Ndebele (South Africa)	Zulu (South Africa)
January	uZibandlela	uTjhirhweni	uMasingane
February	uNhlolanja	uMhlolanja	uNhlolanja
March	uMbimbitho	uNtaka	uNdasa
April	uMabasa	uSihlabantangana	UMbasa
May	uNkwekwezi	uMrhayili	UNhlaba
June	uNhlangula	uMgwengweni	UNhlangulana
July	uNtulikazi	uVelabahlinze	uNtulikazi
August	uNcwabakazi	uRhoboyi	UNcwaba
September	uMpandula	uKhukhulamungu	uMandulo
October	uMfumfu	uSewula	uMfumfu
November	uLwezi	uSinyikhaba	uLwezi
December	uMpalakazi	uNobayeni	uZibandlela

Grammar

Ndebele grammar is similar to that of Zulu, with some distinct differences. Northern Ndebele is a Nguni language and is to some extent also mutually intelligible with Swati and Xhosa, the predominant language in the Eastern Cape.

Nouns

The Northern Ndebele noun consists of two essential parts, the prefix and the stem. Using the prefixes, nouns can be grouped into noun classes, which are numbered consecutively, to ease comparison with other Bantu languages.

The following table gives an overview of Northern Ndebele noun classes, arranged according to singular-plural pairs.

Class	Singular	Plural
1/2	um(u)-[1]	aba-, abe-
1a/2a	u-	o-
3/4	um(u)-[1]	imi-
5/6	i-, ili-	ama-
7/8	is(i)-	iz(i)-
9/10	iN-	iziN-
11/10	u-, ulu-	
14	ubu-, ub-, utsh-	
15	uku-	
17	uku-	

[1] **umu**- replaces **um**- before monosyllabic stems, e. g. **umu**ntu (person).

Verbs

Verbs use the following affixes for the subject and the object:

Person/Class	Prefix	Infix
1st sing.	ngi-	-ngi-
2nd sing.	u-	-wu-
1st plur.	si-	-si-
2nd plur.	li-	-li-
1	u-	-m(u)-
2	ba-	-ba-
3	u-	-m(u)-
4	i-	-yi-
5	li-	-li-
6	a-	-wa-
7	si-	-si-
8	zi-	-zi-
9	i-	-yi-
10	zi-	-zi-
11	lu-	-lu-
14	bu-	-bu-
15	ku-	-ku-
17	ku-	-ku-
reflexive		-zi-

See also

- Matabele
- Zulu language
- Transvaal Ndebele language
- Provinces of Zimbabwe
- Matabeleland North
- Matabeleland South
- Bulawayo

References

1. Ndebele (https://www.ethnologue.com/18/language/nde/) at *Ethnologue* (18th ed., 2015)
2. Hammarström, Harald; Forkel, Robert; Haspelmath, Martin, eds. (2017). "Zimbabwean Ndebele" (http://glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/nort2795). *Glottolog 3.0*. Jena, Germany: Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.

3. Jouni Filip Maho, 2009. New Updated Guthrie List Online (https://web.archive.org/web/201802 03191542/http://goto.glocalnet.net/mahopapers/nuglonline.pdf)
4. "Documentation for ISO 639 identifier: nde" (https://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langc odes_name.php?code_ID=319). ISO 639-2 Registration Authority - Library of Congress. Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20171222051225/http://www.loc.gov/standards/iso639-2/php/langcodes_name.php?code_ID=319) from the original on 2017-12-22. Retrieved 2017-07-04. "Name: North Ndebele"
5. "Documentation for ISO 639 identifier: nde" (http://www-01.sil.org/iso639-3/documentation.as p?id=nde). ISO 639-3 Registration Authority - SIL International. Archived (https://web.archive.o rg/web/20171101121928/http://www-01.sil.org/iso639-3/documentation.asp?id=nde) from the original on 2017-11-01. Retrieved 2017-07-04. "Name: North Ndebele"
6. Langa Khumalo, "Language Contact and Lexical Change: A Lexicographical Terminographical Interface in Zimbabwean Ndebele," Lexikos 14, no. 108 (2004).
7. Anthony Cope, "A Consolidated Classification of the Bantu Languages," African Studies 30, nos. 3–4 1971): 213–36.
8. Nyembezi, C.L.S., 1957. Learn Zulu, Cape Town: Shuter & SHooter
9. D.K. Rycroft "Ndebele and Zulu: Some Phonetic and Tonal Comparisons," Zambezia, no. 2 (1980): 109–28.
10. Skhosana, Philemon Buti (2009). "3". The Linguistic Relationship between Southern and Northern Ndebele (http://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/28563/Complete.pdf?sequ ence=8) (PDF). Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20151117033501/http://repository.up.a c.za/bitstream/handle/2263/28563/Complete.pdf?sequence=8) (PDF) from the original on 2015-11-17.
11. D.K. Rycroft "Ndebele and Zulu: Some Phonetic and Tonal Comparisons," Zambezia, no. 2 (1980): 109–28.
12. Shenk, J.R. A New Ndebele Grammar
13. NorthernNdebele.blogspot.com NorthernNdebele.blogspot.com

Further reading

- Bowern, Claire; Lotridge, Victoria, eds. (2002). Ndebele. Munich: LINCOM EUROPA. ISBN 3-89586-465-X.
- Sibanda, Galen (2004). Verbal Phonology and Morphology of Ndebele (https://escholarship.or g/uc/item/6cf9w3j2) (Ph.D.). University of California, Berkeley.
- Hadebe, Samukele (2002). The Standardisation of the Ndebele Language Through Dictionary-making. University of Zimbabwe - University of Oslo.
- Skhosana, P.B. (2010). The Linguistic Relationship between Southern and Northern Ndebele. University of Pretoria: DLitt Thesis.

External links

- Northern Ndebele for Beginners (http://northernndebele.blogspot.com/)
- Speak Ndebele (https://web.archive.org/web/20110306165314/http://www.speakndebele.com/)
- The History of the Ndebele People (http://www.bulawayo1872.com/history/ndebele.htm)